Secular Prayers

As referenced in "An Ultimate from Immanence: Lotus Buddhism Redefined for a Secular Worldview."

Introduction:

The first three of the following secular prayers are adaptations of the traditional rituals of Nichiren Shoshu, the Soka Gakkai, and Nichiren Shu. While the content of each secular prayer set differs from its original counterpart, the prayer structures remain the same. This is to accommodate those who choose to transition into a secular practice, but are comfortable with their previous format. In the rituals of Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai, the secular prayers are read in silence. As such, they can be read alongside and without disturbing traditionalists.

A key feature of the Shoshu and Shu secular prayers is that they implicitly relegate to the past long-standing sectarian disputes over supernatural criteria. As for the Soka Gakkai secular prayers, practitioners now have the option of embracing a belief that is free of supernaturalism and, like with the Nichiren Shoshu and Nichiren Shu secular prayers, is not bound to a particular organization.

The last prayer is for an independent practice, as some may no longer want to associate with a traditional group or never had a relationship with one to begin with. What sets these prayers apart from the other secular versions is that they introduce the option of chanting *Sezoku Hoke Kyō* (a secular Lotus Sutra) instead of *Nam/Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*. There is also a suggestion for an alternative image of reverence.

Of note, similar secular prayers could be prepared for any other branch of the Lotus tradition.

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Secular Shoshu Silent Prayers

The Nichiren Shoshu ritual includes recitations in classical Japanese of the opening prose section of the second chapter and entire sixteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The ceremony is performed before a properly enshrined image of reverence called a Gohonzon at home or at a temple, while seated in a pew, chair, or situated on one's heels when kneeling. Accessories for a home altar should include at a minimum a bell, a candle, a cup of water, and fresh greens. Beads are held in unfolded hands, reverently poised in the prayer position. There are five recitations of the liturgy during a single session in the morning, which lasts about forty-five minutes, and three recitations during the evening prayer session, which takes about thirty minutes. Each recitation is considered a "prayer." The Silent Prayers are read during quiet periods after reciting each prayer. After all prayers are recited, both morning and evening sessions are followed by chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo for about five minutes or longer. [1]

The First Prayer is performed only during the morning prayer session. Face the Gohonzon and, while bowing in reverence, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times. Turn and face east, chant three times again, bow and recite the liturgy from the second chapter and the verse section of the sixteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra. At the end, chant three times again but this time using the formal version of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. Bow, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times, and read the following:

> **With faith's highest virtue sourced in immanence, the ability to shape our lives in its likeness depends on sincere and thoughtful effort alone. This ceremony supports the effort.**

Chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times.

The Second Prayer is performed in both the morning and evening prayer sessions. Face the Gohonzon, ring the bell seven times, recite the liturgy from the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, then ring the bell three times. This is followed by the recitation of both the prose and verse section of the sixteenth chapter. The Second Prayer is the only one in which the entire sixteenth chapter is recited. In closing, chant the formal Namu Myoho Renge Kyo three times, ring the bell five times, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times, bow and read the following:

> **Our sacred image has come to represent the conditional emergence of benevolence as gifted by time, process, and potential. Though relieved of its supernatural foundations, it continues to project an inherent pureness that can surpass and better both civil and religious authority, and encourage the pursuit of a more peaceful world.**

Chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times while facing the Gohonzon.

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[1] Resource information included a review of *The Liturgy of Nichiren Shoshu,* published in 2015 by the Nichiren Shoshu Head Temple, Fujinomiya, Japan. See pp. 32-37. The following two links are to a copy of the traditional Nichiren Shoshu liturgy and a picture of their image of reverence:
https://web.archive.org/web/20230405044617/http://www.bahaistudies.net/asma/nichirenshoshu.pdf and
https://web.archive.org/web/20240215003929/https://i.ebayimg.com/images/g/8v8AAOSwWydlq2Qo/s-l500.jpg.

The Third Prayer is performed in both the morning and evening prayer sessions. Face the Gohonzon, ring the bell seven times, recite the liturgy from the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, then ring the bell three times. This is followed by recitation of the verse section of the sixteenth chapter. In closing, chant the formal Namu Myoho Renge Kyo three times, ring the bell five times, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times, bow and read the following: (There are four parts to this prayer.)

> 3a: **The prayers hereby replaced paid homage to protective deities, an object of worship with extraordinary attributes, Nichiren Daishonin as the eternally compassionate Buddha, and the temporal preservation of his spirit by a lineage of high priests. They also endowed the object of worship, the Daishonin, and the high priests with a beneficial power.**

Face the Gohonzon, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times and read the following Silent Prayer.

> 3b: **For some, the transcendent elements of the prior prayers still resonate. For others, they are remnants of the past, especially now when there is a path forward without them.**

Face the Gohonzon, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times and read the following Silent Prayer.

> 3c: **In response to calls for a language of unification capable of lifting all faiths, the Lotus Sutra's revelation of a supreme truth beyond comprehension was converted into a universal ethic that requires understanding to respect.**

Face the Gohonzon, silently chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times and read the following Silent Prayer.

> 3d: **The implications proved liberating, for the ultimate insight is no longer limited to a mystical union subject to claims of sectarian custody, but instead observed firsthand in the natural order and open for emulation based on one's best judgment.**

Chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times while facing the Gohonzon.

The Fourth Prayer is performed only in the morning sessions. Face the Gohonzon, ring the bell seven times, recite the liturgy from the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, then ring the bell three times. This is followed by recitation of the verse section of the sixteenth chapter. In closing, chant the formal Namu Myoho Renge Kyo three times, ring the bell five times, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times, bow and offer the following: (There are two parts to this prayer.)

> 4a: **This practice merges the meaning of these prayers with the rhythm of a twice-daily recitation from chapters two and sixteen of the Lotus Sutra.**

Face the Gohonzon and chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times.

4b: **And, while chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, it welcomes reflection on such matters as overcoming difficulties, personal growth, and the enhancement of a common good.**

The Fifth Prayer is performed in both the morning and evening sessions. Face the Gohonzon, ring the bell seven times, recite the liturgy from the second Chapter of the Lotus Sutra, then ring the bell three times. This is followed by recitation of the verse section of the sixteenth Chapter. At the end of this recitation ring the bell seven times while beginning to chant for a minimum of five minutes. To end chanting, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times with a ring of the bell at each syllable of the last Myoho Renge Kyo. Then, the following:

5a: **Before closing, a few moments of appreciation for those held dear.** (Ring the bell continuously while paying respects.)

Then, face the Gohonzon, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times, and read:

5b: **We pray to carry on with a tradition long dedicated to cultivating a foremost blend of wisdom and compassion in all.**

To conclude the prayer session, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times with a ring of the bell with each syllable of the last Myoho Renge Kyo while bowing in reverence.

Secular Soka Silent Prayers

The Soka Gakkai International ritual is an abbreviation of the Nichiren Shoshu format. They recite only three prayers in both the morning and evening sessions. Their liturgy includes the initial prose section of the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra and only the verse section of the sixteenth chapter. Like Nichiren Shoshu, the SGI Silent Prayers are read during quiet periods after reciting each prayer. Their recitation of the liturgy is also followed by chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo for about five minutes or longer. [2]

Preamble (morning): Prior to beginning the ceremony, bow in reverence, and silently read the following:

> **With faith's highest virtue sourced in immanence, the ability to shape our lives in its likeness depends on sincere and thoughtful effort alone. This ceremony supports the effort.**

First Prayer (morning and evening): To begin the recitation of the liturgy, face the Gohonzon, ring the bell, and chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times. Then, after the liturgy is recited, read the following first silent prayer.

> **Our sacred image has come to represent the conditional emergence of benevolence as gifted by time, process, and potential. Though relieved of its supernatural foundations, it continues to project an inherent pureness that can surpass and better both civil and religious authority, and encourage the pursuit of a more peaceful world.**

Chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times.

Second Silent Prayer (Part A in the morning and part B in the evening): Face the Gohonzon, ring the bell, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times, and read the designated Silent Prayer.

> A: **In response to calls for a language of unification capable of lifting all faiths, the Lotus Sutra's revelation of a supreme truth beyond comprehension was converted into a universal ethic that requires understanding to respect. The implications proved liberating, for the ultimate insight is no longer limited to a mystical union subject to claims of sectarian custody, but instead observed firsthand in the natural order and open for emulation based on one's best judgment.**
>
> B: **This practice merges the meaning of these prayers with the rhythm of a twice-daily recitation from chapters two and sixteen of the Lotus Sutra. And, while chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, it welcomes reflection on such matters as**

[2] Resource information included a review of *The Liturgy of the Soka Gakkai International*, published in 2018 by The World Tribune Press, Santa Monica, CA. See pp. 18-19. The following two links are to a copy of the SGI Silent Prayers and a picture of their image of reverence:
https://web.archive.org/web/20230924180821/https://chantforhappiness.blogspot.com/2015/12/revised-silent-prayers-for-sgi-members.html.
https://web.archive.org/web/20211028184523/https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SGI_Gohonzon.jpg.

overcoming difficulties, personal growth, and the enhancement of a common good.

Chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times.

Third Silent Prayer (morning and evening): Face the Gohonzon, ring the bell, and chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times. When finished with the liturgy, ring the bell five times as you begin chanting. Then continue chanting as long as you wish. Afterwards, ring the bell three times and read the following silent prayers in both morning and evening sessions:

A: **Before closing, a few moments of appreciation for those held dear.** (Ring the bell continuously while bowing and paying respects.)

Then, face the Gohonzon, chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times, and read:

B: **We pray to carry on with a tradition long dedicated to cultivating a foremost blend of wisdom and compassion in all.**

To conclude, ring the bell and chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo three times.

Secular Shu Special Prayer

Services in the Nichiren Shu tradition take on different forms, from simple to very ornate. At home, morning and evening prayer sessions are conducted at an altar with an enshrined Gohonzon. These services may include reciting several chapters of the Lotus Sutra to just chanting Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. The Nichiren Buddhist International Center in Hayward, California, for example, prescribes reciting an invocation that honors their image of reverence (the Gohonzon), the Eternal Buddha Sakyamuni, Nichiren Shonin, and Nichiji Shonin - one of Nichiren's six senior disciples. It also includes reciting the opening prose section of the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the verse section of the sixteenth chapter, the Expedients section of Chapter Two, the Triple World Parable in Chapter Three, chanting Namu Myoho Renge Kyo for a while, and then reciting sections of Chapters Ten and Eleven of the Sutra. After these recitations, a special prayer is read, usually out loud.[3] *The following is a special prayer to replace the traditional version:*

With faith's highest virtue sourced in immanence, the ability to shape our lives in its likeness depends on sincere and thoughtful effort alone. This ceremony supports the effort.

Our sacred image has come to represent the conditional emergence of benevolence as gifted by time, process, and potential. Though relieved of its supernatural foundations, it continues to project an inherent pureness that can surpass and better both civil and religious authority, and encourage the pursuit of a more peaceful world.

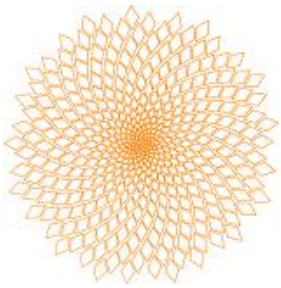
The prayer hereby replaced paid homage to the eternal Buddha Sakyamuni, protective deities, and the transmigratory appearance of Nichiren Shonin in the Latter Day of the Law. They also honored ancestral spirits, as if they were real. For some, the transcendent elements of the prior prayer still resonate. For others, they are remnants of the past, especially now when there is a path forward without them.

In response to calls for a language of unification capable of lifting all faiths, the Lotus Sutra's revelation of a supreme truth beyond comprehension was converted into a universal ethic that requires understanding to respect. The implications proved liberating, for the ultimate insight is no longer limited to a mystical union subject to claims of sectarian custody, but instead observed firsthand in the natural order and open for emulation based on one's best judgment.

This practice merges the meaning of this prayer with the rhythm of a twice-daily recitation from the Lotus Sutra. And, while chanting Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, it welcomes reflection on such matters as overcoming difficulties, personal growth, and the enhancement of a common good. The primary aspiration being to carry on with a tradition long dedicated to cultivating a foremost blend of wisdom and compassion in all.

[3] Based on a review of *The Liturgy of Nichiren Shu*, 2015, The Nichiren Shu International Center, Hayward, CA. See pp. 37-38. The following two links are to a copy of the traditional Nichiren Shu liturgy and a picture of their image of reverence: https://web.archive.org/web/20240212101031/https://www.nichirenbayarea.org/nichiren-shu-daily-service and https://web.archive.org/web/20230607031613/https:/www.lionsroar.com/what-is-the-gohonzon/.

Secular Independent Prayer



Spiral Flower Graphic by Robert Dixon, 1987. Mathographics, (p. 137). Dover Publications, NY.
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The above graphic is a suggestion for a secular independent image of reverence. Instead of chanting Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō, try Sezoku Hoke Kyō (romaji for "A Secular Lotus Sutra").[4] *Veneration is inferred by the way the expression is invoked. To supplement chanting, the traditional recitation from the Lotus Sutra's second and sixteenth chapters is always an option.*

Also, depending on one's situation, a ritual may not be necessary. Instead, recalling "The conditional emergence of benevolence as gifted by time, process, and potential." on occasion can be sufficient. If a ritual is performed, consider including the following prayer:

> **With faith's highest virtue sourced in immanence, the ability to shape our lives in its likeness depends on sincere and thoughtful effort alone. This ceremony supports the effort.**
>
> **Our sacred image represents the conditional emergence of benevolence as gifted by time, process, and potential. Thus endowed, it projects an inherent pureness free of supernatural inference that can surpass and better both civil and religious authority, and encourage the pursuit of a more peaceful world.**
>
> **In response to calls for a language of unification capable of lifting all faiths, what was once a supreme truth beyond comprehension was converted into a universal ethic that requires understanding to respect. The implications proved liberating, for the ultimate insight is no longer limited to a mystical union subject to claims of sectarian custody, but observed firsthand in the natural order and open for emulation based on one's best judgment.**
>
> **Our practice merges the meaning of this prayer with the rhythm of chanting Sezoku Hoke Kyō and welcomes reflection on such matters as overcoming difficulties, personal growth, and the enhancement of a common good. The primary aspiration being to cultivate a foremost blend of wisdom and compassion in all.**

[4] As for an English translation of "Sezoku," see pp. 92-93 of "The Problem of Secularization: A Preliminary Analysis" by Tamaru Noriyoshi. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies,* vol. 6, 1-2 (1979): pp. 89-114. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30233192.